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The Best of San Diego

Best known for its benign climate and fabulous beaches, San Diego is one big outdoor playground. With 70 miles of sandy coastline—plus pretty, sheltered Mission Bay—you can choose from swimming, snorkeling, windsurfing, kayaking, bicycling, skating, and tons of other fun in or near the water. The city is also home to top-notch attractions, including three world-famous animal parks and splendid Balboa Park, a cultural and recreational jewel that's one of the finest urban parks in the country. And of course San Diego also reflects its Spanish-Mexican heritage in every corner—in fact, bustling Tijuana is just across the border, 40 minutes away.

Once dismissed as a slow-growth, politically conservative navy town, San Diego has been expanding steadily during the past 2 decades, and now boasts an almost Los Angeles–like diversity of neighborhoods and residents. Approximately 1.3 million people live here, making it the seventh-largest city in the United States. At this writing, the city's biotech/tourism/telecom-based economy fires on all burners, and San Diego also boasts one of the fastest-rising housing markets in the country; fortunately, a heightened sensitivity to historical preservation means formerly seedy downtown areas and architecturally rich suburbs are being carefully restored. These often charming districts lure yuppies to invest in the future of these neighborhoods, and also help to update the face of San Diego's dining, shopping, and entertainment.

So pack a laid-back attitude along with your sandals and swimsuit, and welcome to California's grown-up beach town.

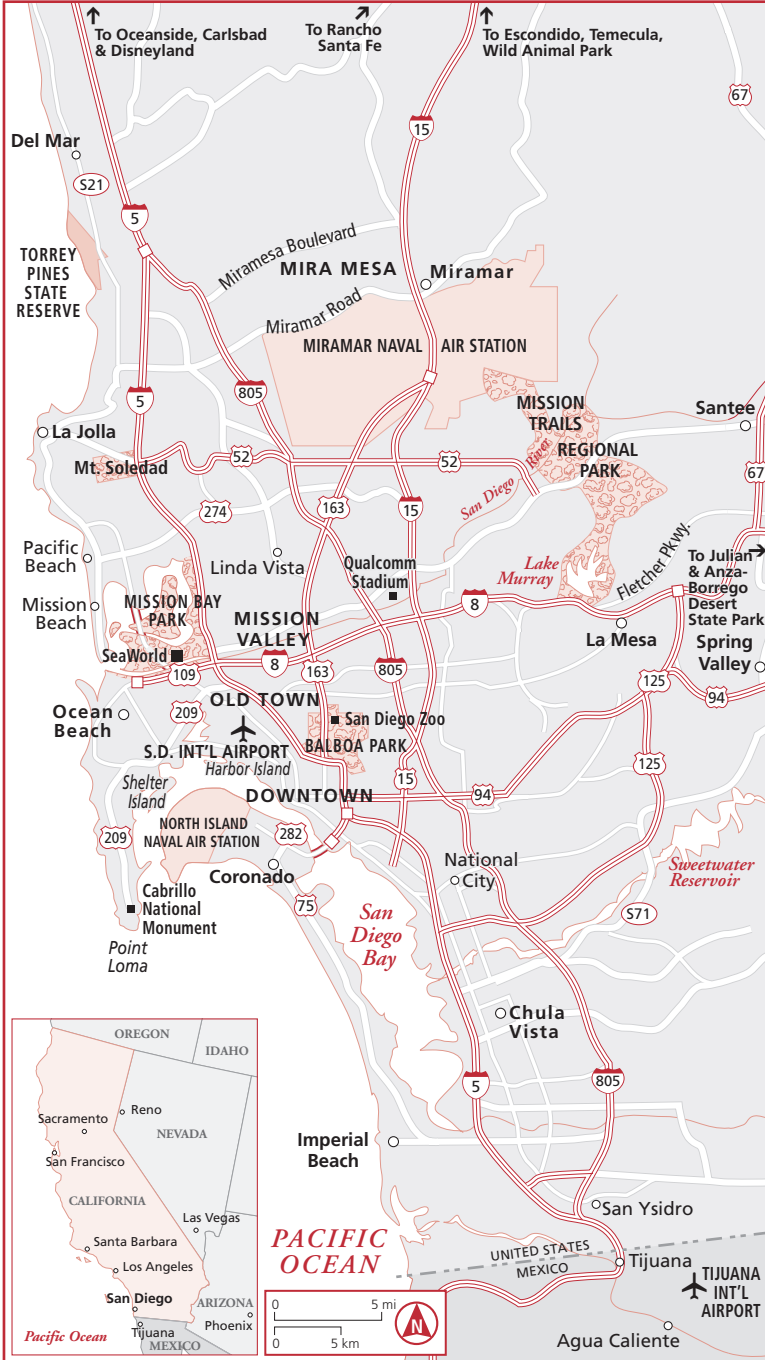
1 Frommer's Favorite San Diego Experiences

- **Driving Over the Bridge to Coronado:** The first time or the fiftieth, there's always an adrenaline rush as you follow this engineering marvel's dramatic curves and catch a glimpse of the panoramic view to either side. Driving west, you can easily pick out the distinctive Hotel Del in the distance long before you reach the "island." See "Orientation" in chapter 4 for more about the city's neighborhoods.
- **Riding on the San Diego Trolley to Mexico:** The trip from downtown costs a mere \$2.50, takes only 40 minutes, and the clean, quick, bright red trolleys are fun in their own right. See "Getting Around" in chapter 4.
- **Taking the Ferry to Coronado:** The 15-minute ride gets you out into San Diego Harbor and provides some of the best views of the city. The ferry runs every hour from the Broadway Pier, so you can tour Coronado on foot, by bike, or by trolley, and return whenever you please. See "Getting Around" in chapter 4.
- **Escaping to Torrey Pines State Reserve:** This state park is set aside for the rarest pine tree in North America. But the bluff-side reserve has short trails that immerse hikers

into a delicate and beautiful coastal environment that is rapidly disappearing. See p. 160.

- **Drinking Coffee at Sidewalk Café:** San Diego offers a plethora of places beyond the ubiquitous Starbucks to enjoy lattes, espressos, and cappuccinos, many of them have outdoor seating areas. Some of my favorites include **Peet's**, 350 University Ave., Hillcrest (☎ 619/296-5995), **Gargoyle Gallery and Café**, 1845 India St., Little Italy (☎ 619/234-1344), the **Pannikin**, 7467 Girard Ave., La Jolla (☎ 858/454-5453), and the various branches of **Living Room Coffeehouse** (p. 114).
- **Watching the Sun Set Over the Ocean:** It's a free and memorable experience. Excellent sunset-watching spots include the Mission Beach and Pacific Beach boardwalks, as well as the beach in Coronado in front of the Hotel del Coronado. At La Jolla's Windansea Beach, wandering down to the water at dusk, wineglass in hand, is a nightly neighborhood event. See "San Diego's Beaches" in chapter 7.
- **Watching the Seals at the Children's Pool:** This tiny La Jolla cove was originally named for the toddlers who could safely frolic behind a man-made seawall. These days, the sand is mostly off-limits to humans, who congregate along the seawall railing or onshore to admire the protected pinnipeds that sun themselves on the beach or on semisubmerged rocks. You can get surprisingly close, and it's a truly mesmerizing sight. See "San Diego's Beaches" in chapter 7.
- **Renting Bikes, Skates, or Kayaks in Mission Bay:** Landscaped shores, calm waters, paved paths, and friendly neighbors make Mission Bay an aquatic playground like no other. Explore on land or water, depending on your energy level, then grab a bite at funky Mission Cafe. See "Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 7.
- **Strolling Through the Gaslamp Quarter:** Victorian commercial buildings that fill a 16½-block area will make you think you've stepped back in time. The beautifully restored buildings, in the heart of downtown, house some of the city's most popular shops, restaurants, and nightspots. See "Walking Tour 1: The Gaslamp Quarter" in chapter 8.
- **Walking Along the Water:** One of my favorite places to stroll in the city is along the waterfront from the Convention Center to the Maritime Museum, with views of aircraft carriers, tuna seiners, and sailboats. See "Walking Tour 2: The Embarcadero" in chapter 8.
- **Listening to Free Sunday Organ Recitals in Balboa Park:** Even if you usually don't like organ music, you might enjoy these outdoor concerts and the crowds they draw—San Diegans with their parents, their children, and their dogs. The music, enhanced by the organist's commentary, runs the gamut from classical to contemporary. Concerts start at 2pm. See "Walking Tour 4: Balboa Park" in chapter 8.
- **Purchasing Just-Picked Produce at a Farmers' Market or Farm-Fresh Stand:** Markets throughout the area sell the bountiful harvest of San Diego County, and organic farms like Chino's are nationally famous for their delicious produce. For directions, see "Shopping A to Z" in chapter 9.
- **Listening to Live Music Outdoors at Humphrey's:** An intimate, palm-fringed venue located on the water at Shelter Island, Humphrey's has name acts from mid-May to October and puts those impersonal summer concert "sheds" found in other cities to

San Diego Area at a Glance



Impressions

Thanks be to God, I have arrived at this Port of San Diego. It is beautiful to behold and does not belie its reputation.

—Father Junípero Serra, 1769

I thought San Diego must be a Heaven on Earth . . . It seemed to me the best spot for building a city I ever saw.

—Alonzo Horton, who developed San Diego's first downtown

shame. See “The Club & Music Scene” in chapter 10.

- **Running with the Grunion:** These tiny fish spawn on San Diego beaches between April and June, and the locals love to be there. To find the date of the next run, pick up a free tide chart at a surf shop or consult the daily newspaper. See the “Running with the Grunion” box on p. 227.
- **Floating Up, Up, and Away Over North County:** Hot-air balloons carry passengers over the golf courses and luxury homes north

of the city. These rides are especially enjoyable at sunset. For details, see “North County Beach Towns: Spots to Surf & Sun” in chapter 11.

- **Visiting the “Lobster Village” in Puerto Nuevo:** South of the border, a few miles south of tacky TJ, Puerto Nuevo's time-honored seaside restaurants serve lobster with rice, beans, tortillas, and freshly made salsa. It's an affordable and deliciously filling meal. See “Exploring Beyond Tijuana” on p. 280.

2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best Historic Hotel:** The **Hotel del Coronado**, 1500 Orange Ave. (☎ 800/HOTEL-DEL or 619/435-8000), positively reeks of history. Opened in 1888, this Victorian masterpiece had some of the first electric lights in existence, and legend has it that the course of history was changed when the Prince of Wales met Wallis Simpson here at a ball. Meticulous restoration has enhanced this glorious landmark, whose early days are well chronicled in displays throughout the hotel. See p. 92.
- **Best for Business Travelers:** The **Marriott San Diego Hotel & Marina**, 333 W. Harbor Dr. (☎ 800/228-9290 or 619/234-1500), screams “business traveler,” with a full-service business center offering plenty of amenities for suits on the go, but there's still

room for a tropical pool and harbor views. Its prime location offers excellent access to downtown. See p. 68.

- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** You don't need to know much about Craftsman-style architecture to appreciate the taste and keen craftsmanship that went into creating **The Lodge at Torrey Pines**, 11480 North Torrey Pines Rd. (☎ 858/777-6690). The lodge—the city's only AAA Five Diamond hotel—sits next to the Torrey Pines Golf Course, San Diego's top links, and you can enjoy a fireplace in your room, sunset ocean views from your balcony, and superb meals at the hotel's A.R. Valentine restaurant. See p. 88.
- **Best for Families:** The **Paradise Point Resort & Spa**, 1404 W. Vacation Rd. (☎ 800/344-2626

or 858/274-4630), is a tropical playground offering enough activities to keep family members of all ages happy. In addition to a virtual Disneyland of on-site options, the aquatic playground of Mission Bay surrounds the hotel's private peninsula. See p. 82.

- **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:** The **Gaslamp Plaza Suites**, 520 E St. (☎ 619/232-9500), is an elegant landmark full of creature comforts that belie its super-friendly rates. You'll also be smack-dab in the heart of the trendy Gaslamp Quarter. See p. 74.
- **Best Budget Hotel:** In San Diego's Little Italy, **La Pensione Hotel**, 606

W. Date St. (☎ 800/232-4683 or 619/236-8000), feels like a small European hotel and offers tidy lodgings at bargain prices. There's an abundance of great dining in the surrounding blocks, and you'll be perfectly situated to explore the rest of town by car. See p. 74.

- **Best Unusual Lodgings:** Fulfill the fantasies of your inner yachtsman with the **Harbor Vacations Club**, 1880 Harbor Island Dr., G-Dock (☎ 800/YACHT-DO or 619/297-9484). It provides powerboats, sailboats, and houseboats docked in a Harbor Island marina. You can sleep on board, lulled by the gentle rocking of the



The Best of San Diego Online

You can find lots of information on San Diego on the Internet; here are a few of my favorite helpful planning and general information sites.

- www.sandiegoartandsol.com is the link for cultural tourism, also overseen by the Convention and Visitors Bureau. You'll find a list of art shows and music events, plus intriguing touring itineraries that delve into the city's culture.
- www.sandiego-online.com, the *San Diego* magazine website, features abbreviated stories from the current month's issue, plus dining and events listings.
- www.sdreader.com, the site of the free weekly *San Diego Reader*, is a great source for club and show listings, plus edgy topical journalism. It has printable dining and other coupons you can really use, plus opinionated arts, eats, and entertainment critiques.
- www.signonsandiego.com is where CitySearch teams up with the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, catering as much to locals as to visitors. It offers plenty of helpful links, plus reviews of restaurants, music, movies, performing arts, museums, outdoor recreation, beaches, and sports.
- www.digitalcity.com/sandiego is a lifestyle guide targeted at locals, and therefore yields occasional off-the-beaten-tourist-path recommendations. You'll find everything from personal ads to constantly changing restaurant spotlights and daily "Top Clicks."
- www.sandiegoinsider.com is a well-rounded online guide containing bar, club, and movie reviews. The dining guide includes lengthy descriptions but few assertive critiques. Suggestions abound for beach-going, hiking, and other outdoor excursions. Searching this site can be tedious, but the articles are generally rewarding.

hull, and then have breakfast ashore; complete the adventure with a skippered cruise later in the day. See p. 72.

- **Best Bed & Breakfast:** The picture-perfect **Heritage Park Bed & Breakfast Inn**, 2470 Heritage Park Row (☎ 800/995-2470 or 619/299-6832), has it all—an exquisitely maintained Victorian house, lively and gracious hosts who delight in creating a pampering and romantic ambience, and an Old Town location equally close to downtown, Hillcrest, and Mission Bay. See p. 78.
- **Best Boutique Inn:** Smartly located in the center of La Jolla, the 20-room **Hotel Parisi**, 1111 Prospect St. (☎ 877/4-PARISI or 858/454-1511), has the composed, quiet feel of a Zen garden, with feng shui-inspired suites, modern furnishings, and subdued color schemes. See p. 86.
- **Best Place to Stay on the Beach:** Although the Hotel Del operation takes the cake, a more moderate landing is found at La Jolla's **The Sea Lodge**, 8110 Camino del Oro

(☎ 800/237-5211 or 858/459-8271), where you can walk right onto the wide beach and frolic amid great waves. Lifeguards and the lack of undertow make this a popular choice for families. Though the rooms are plain, the staff is all-pro. See p. 90.

- **Best Hotel for Travelers with Disabilities:** While many of San Diego's hotels make minimal concessions to wheelchair-accessibility codes, downtown's **Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego**, 1 Market Place (☎ 800/233-1234 or 619/232-1234), goes the distance. There are 23 rooms with roll-in showers and lowered closet racks and peepholes. Ramps are an integral part of all the public spaces, rather than an afterthought. The hotel's Braille labeling is also thorough. See p. 68.
- **Best Hotel Pool:** The genteel pool at **La Valencia**, 1132 Prospect St. (☎ 800/451-0772 or 858/454-0771), is oh-so-special, with its spectacular setting overlooking Scripps Park and the Pacific. See p. 86.

3 Best Dining Bets

- **Best Spot for a Business Lunch:** **Dakota Grill & Spirits**, 901 Fifth Ave., in the Gaslamp Quarter (☎ 619/234-5554), has the three most important ingredients of a business lunch locale—great location, appropriate atmosphere, and excellent food—but without prices that scream “power lunch.” See p. 104.
- **Best View:** Many restaurants overlook the ocean, but only from **Brockton Villa**, 1235 Coast Blvd., La Jolla (☎ 858/454-7393), can you see sublime La Jolla Cove. Diners with a window seat will feel as if they're looking out on a gigantic picture postcard. See p. 124.
- **Best Value:** The word “huge” barely begins to describe the portions at **Filippi's Pizza Grotto**, 1747 India St. (☎ 619/232-5095), where a salad for one is enough for three, and an order of lasagna must weigh a pound. There's a kids' menu, and Filippi's has locations all over, including Pacific Beach, Mission Valley, and Escondido. See p. 106.
- **Best for Kids:** At the **Old Spaghetti Factory**, 275 Fifth Ave., in the Gaslamp Quarter (☎ 619/233-4323), family dining is the name of the game—so if your kids are noisy, nobody will notice. See p. 107.

- **Best Chinese Cuisine:** **Emerald Restaurant**, 3709 Convoy St., Kearny Mesa (☎ 858/565-6888), is in the most unromantic of locations, yet the culinary wizardry that transpires in the kitchen draws the Chinese community citywide for Hong Kong–style seafood, much of it plucked from live fish tanks. See p. 129.
- **Best Class Act:** The polished service and elegant setting at **Laurel**, 505 Laurel St., next to Balboa Park (☎ 619/239-2222), are urbane and discriminating, like the best New York restaurants. But the food is prepared with inventive flair and the Rhône-heavy wine list soars, making Laurel a rewarding splurge for a special occasion. See p. 107.
- **Best Seafood:** At **Star of the Sea**, 1380 N. Harbor Dr. (☎ 619/232-7408), you'll find the city's best package of fresh seafood, graceful presentation, and memorable views from the edge of San Diego Bay. See p. 102.
- **Best New-American Cuisine:** Chef Deborah Scott's menu at **Indigo Grill**, 1536 India St., in Little Italy (☎ 619/234-6802), cleverly fuses the flavors of the Pacific Coast from Mexico to Alaska. The results create the city's most adventurous menu, and one of its most delicious. See p. 104.
- **Best Mexican Cuisine:** Rather than the "combination plate" fare that's common on this side of the border, **El Agave Tequileria**, 2304 San Diego Ave., Old Town (☎ 619/220-0692), offers a memorable combination of freshly prepared recipes from Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, and Mexico City—along with an impressive selection of boutique and artisan tequilas. See p. 113.
- **Best Pizza:** For gourmet pizza from a wood-fired oven, head for **Sammy's California Woodfired Pizza**, a local institution with several locations, including 770 Fourth Ave., in the Gaslamp Quarter (☎ 619/230-8888). For the traditional Sicilian variety, line up for **Filippi's Pizza Grotto** (see "Best Value," above, or p. 106).
- **Best Desserts:** You'll forget your diet at **Extraordinary Desserts**, 2929 Fifth Ave., Hillcrest (☎ 619/294-7001). Heck, it's so good you might forget your name! Proprietor Karen Krasne has a *Certificatede Patisserie* from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, and makes everything fresh on the premises daily. See p. 110.
- **Best Late-Night Dining:** Open later than anyplace else downtown, **Café Lulu**, 419 F St. (☎ 619/238-0114), serves eclectic meat-free fare and inventive espresso drinks until 1am during the week, 3am on weekends. See p. 106.
- **Best Fast Food:** Fish tacos from the burgeoning local chain **Rubio's**, 4504 E. Mission Bay Dr. (☎ 619/272-2801), and other locations, are legendary in San Diego. Sounds strange? Taste one and you'll know why there's a line. See "Baja Fish Tacos" on p. 116.
- **Best Picnic Fare:** Pack a superb sandwich from the **Bread & Cie.**, 350 University Ave. (☎ 619/683-9322), where the hearty breads are the toast of the city; see p. 111. Or head to one of several locations of **Whole Foods**, where the deli houses a smashing selection of delicious hot and cold items, the city's best cheese collection and a crisp salad bar; you'll find them in Hillcrest at 711 University Ave. (☎ 619/294-2800), and in La Jolla at 8825 Villa La Jolla Dr. (☎ 858/642-6700).